



Misconceptions & Facts about Student Learning Objectives

January 2013

Misconceptions

FACTS

“Student Learning Objectives interfere with real teaching and learning.”

The Student Learning Objective process facilitates teaching and learning. The use of Student Learning Objectives encourages educators to identify the most important skills and knowledge their students need to learn; set appropriate learning goals for their students; monitor their students’ progress toward the goals; and assess the degree to which students achieve their learning goals. The Student Learning Objective process is just a formalization of existing best practices and documentation of students’ learning.

“Student Learning Objectives are new tests teachers have to give that are separate from what we are teaching.”

Student Learning Objectives do not require teachers to create or use new assessments. Student Learning Objectives do require teachers to identify the most important learning that occurs within their grade or subject which should be measured by a high quality assessment. If the process of writing a Student Learning Objective reveals a need for a stronger or more aligned assessment, the teacher can create or select one. However, the primary purpose of that assessment should be to measure what the teacher is teaching and the students are learning. **No assessment should be used just to collect evidence for a Student Learning Objective.** The primary purpose of assessments should be to drive instruction and ongoing improvement, regardless of whether or not the data collected is used as evidence for a Student Learning Objective.

“Student Learning Objectives are unfair because they are not the same for all teachers.”

The Student Learning Objective process is the same for all teachers in Rhode Island. However, one of the major strengths of the Student Learning Objective approach is that they are content-and grade/course-specific. The best way to measure student learning differs from one course or grade to another (e.g., measuring student learning in a third grade art class vs. a tenth grade chemistry class). Student Learning Objectives present an opportunity for teachers to be actively involved in deciding how to best measure the learning of their specific population of students, while providing a consistent process for all teachers across the state.

“Student Learning Objectives are not a valid measure of teacher effectiveness.”

Every approved teacher evaluation system in Rhode Island relies on multiple measures of performance to develop a fair, accurate, and comprehensive picture of teacher effectiveness. Student Learning Objective results are a telling detail, but they do not tell the whole story – no single measure can. That is why no school or district in Rhode Island evaluates teachers based solely on Student Learning Objectives. Teachers, along with their evaluators, should set Student Learning Objectives that are reflective of the work that they do and measured using valid assessments.

“Student Learning Objectives force students to do things that are not developmentally appropriate.”

Teachers should set Student Learning Objectives that are appropriate for the specific population of students they work with. Targets should be informed by students’ baseline data and tiered to reflect students’ varying levels of preparedness. All Student Learning Objective targets should be both rigorous and attainable, and the expectation is that all students make academic gains regardless of where they start.